

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 231281
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TO AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 231281

EXDIS, FOR AMBASSADOR FROM HOLBROOKE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, SHUM, KS, US

SUBJECT: DRAFT RESPONSE TO FRASER LETTER ON ANTI-DEMOCRATIC
GOVERNMENT IN ROK

REF: (A) STATE 219745, (B) SEOUL 8074

1. WE HAVE CONSIDERED THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH RESPONSE TO THE
FRASER LETTER (REF A) AN EXTREMELY DELICATE MATTER IN VIEW
OF ITS DIRECT ATTACK ON THE ROKG AND UNWARRANTED COMPARISON
WITH THE SOVIET SYSTEM. COUPLED WITH THE CONVICTION IN MANY
QUARTERS IN KOREA THAT SPONSORS OF THE LETTER ARE COOPERATING
WITH PARTISAN OPPONENTS OF PRESENT ROKG IN EFFORT TO ENLIST
U.S. SUPPORT FOR OVERTHROW OF PRESIDENT PARK AND PRESENT
CONSTITUTION, WE ARE CONCERNED THAT, WHILE WE DO NOT ENGAGE
IN DEBATE OF THE CHARGES, WE NEVERTHELESS SEPARATE USG
CONCERN FOR HUMAN RIGHTS FROM IMPLIED ATTACK ON THE GOVERN-
MENT AND PARK HIMSELF. PRESS RELEASE TACTICS BY LETTER
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PAGE 02 STATE 231281

SPONSORS HERE, WIDE REACTION IN KOREA, AND RECENT
EFFORT BY DISSIDENTS DIRECTLY TO CAPITALIZE ON THE LETTER
(REF B) AND THEREBY MANIPULATE USG INVOLVEMENT IN DOMESTIC
KOREAN POLITICS ALL MAKE IT PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT TO RESPOND
FAIRLY TO THIS LETTER WITHOUT DIRECTLY INJURING BILATERAL
RELATIONS IN A SIGNIFICANT MANNER.

2. FOR THIS REASON WE WOULD APPRECIATE YOUR THOUGHTFUL COMMENT ON THE PROPOSED DRAFT RESPONSE QUOTED BELOW, AND ASSESSMENT OF THE PITFALLS IN HOW WE HANDLE THIS ISSUE. THE DRAFT RESPONSE HAS BEEN TENTATIVELY APPROVED BY BOTH HA AND EA, AND IS DESIGNED TO BE SENT FROM "H" FOLLOWING INTERIM ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE CONGRESSIONAL LETTER BY THE WHITE HOUSE.

3. WE HAVE ATTEMPTED IN THIS DRAFT TO ENSURE THAT WE NOT UNDERMINE OUR EFFORTS TO PERSUADE THE ROKG TO TAKE FURTHER CONCRETE STEPS IN IMPROVING HUMAN RIGHTS AND TOLERATING DISSENTING VIEWS. THUS TO THE EXTENT FEASIBLE WE HAVE SOUGHT TO DELINK OUR FUNDAMENTAL CONCERNS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS FROM THE ALLEGATIONS IN THE LETTER THAT THE KOREAN AND SOVIET SYSTEMS ARE SIMILAR. FOR OTHER REASONS, HOWEVER, WE DO NOT WISH TO MENTION THE SOVIET UNION BY NAME IN THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH RESPONSE.

4. BEGIN TEXT: DEAR MR. FRASER:

A. THE PRESIDENT HAS ASKED ME TO THANK YOU FOR THE CONSCIENTIOUS VIEWS EXPRESSED IN YOUR LETTER OF AUGUST 9 REGARDING DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA.

B. YOUR CONCERN OVER REPORTED INFRINGEMENTS ON HUMAN AND CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 STATE 231281

CIVIL RIGHTS IS SHARED BY THIS ADMINISTRATION. OUR VIEWS ON CONDITIONS IN KOREA WERE REFLECTED IN OUR REPORT TO THE CONGRESS IN JANUARY 1978 (COUNTRY REPORTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES), WHICH RAISED SERIOUS QUESTIONS ON RESTRICTIONS ON POLITICAL LIBERTIES. AMONG OTHER MATTERS, THE REPORT NOTED THE LACK OF INSTITUTIONAL PROTECTION FOR OPPOSING POLITICAL POINTS OF VIEW.

C. IN ALL OUR DIALOGUE AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE KOREAN GOVERNMENT, WE HAVE MADE CLEAR OUR CONCERNS ABOUT THE EMERGENCY RESTRICTIONS ON DISSENT AND FREE POLITICAL EXPRESSION WHICH EXIST. WE HAVE NOT HESITATED AT ANY TIME TO DISCUSS ACTIONS OR CONDITIONS WHICH IN OUR VIEW ARE INCOMPATIBLE WITH DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES OR INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS. WE HAVE TAKEN THOSE ACTIONS WE FELT NECESSARY TO UNDERSCORE THESE STATEMENTS OF CONCERN.

D. WITH REGARD TO YOUR CHARACTERIZATION OF THE KOREAN ELECTORAL SYSTEM, IT IS AT LEAST RELEVANT TO NOTE THAT MORE THAN 5,400 CANDIDATES VIED FOR THE 2,583 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTORAL COLLEGE SEATS, INDICATING AT LEAST SOME INTERNAL COMPETITION. ALSO, DESPITE ALL OF THE OBVIOUS LIMITATIONS

ON DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION BUILT INTO THE CURRENT
POLITICAL SYSTEM, THE LEVEL OF INTERNAL DEBATE OVER POLICY
APPEARS GREATER THAN WHERE POLICIES ARE ELABORATED BY AN
EXECUTIVE STRUCTURE DIVORCED FROM ANY ELECTORAL PROCESS
EXCEPT THAT OF THE PARTY ITSELF.

E. THE CONCERNS WHICH YOU AND YOUR COLLEAGUES HAVE
EXPRESSED ARE IMPORTANT TO THE PRESIDENT AND WILL BE
CLEARLY BEFORE US AS WE SEEK TO FOSTER HUMAN DIGNITY AND
RESPONSIVE GOVERNMENT IN ALL OF OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER
NATIONS. SINCERELY, DOUGLAS J. BENNET, JR. END TEXT.
CHRISTOPHER

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